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FCC Mail Room

**MADISON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION**David Copeland, Ed.D.
SuperintendentFederal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554**DOCKET FILE COPY ORIGINAL**

November 24, 2014

Dear Sir/Madame,

I am writing today in response to FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler's recently announced proposal to raise the E-Rate funding cap by \$1.5 billion. The E-Rate program currently represents the only source of federal funding aimed at educational technology and is critical in providing discounts to assist schools (like mine) to obtain affordable telecommunications and internet access. As the District Technology Coordinator for the Madison County Schools in Madison County, Alabama, I strongly support the infusion of the additional funding, and urge you to do the same.

Since the E-rate program was established, it has been valuable in ensuring that the schools in the Madison County School District have the connectivity necessary in the digital world. The program has provided the discounts that have helped the district afford the cost of the bandwidth we have needed for our students and teachers to access the content, resources, and tools that are available through the Internet. Without the E-rate program there would be almost no way, especially in the last several years that we would be able to afford the access we now enjoy.

With all that noted, we are now experiencing a change in how the Internet is used. In the not so distant past, the Internet was only used a source of information (mostly text and pictures) that required a nominal amount of bandwidth to acquire. Now the demand for bandwidth has grown exponentially as our students visit websites with streaming audio/video and interactive programs. They also take high-stakes tests from programs that reside in the Cloud. All of these require larger amounts of bandwidth than the simple web searches of the past. Broadband access is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity.

As we move more and more to cloud-based instructional programs, the demand for additional bandwidth is never ending, causing higher costs for the district as we try to provide the digital resources for our students. Additionally, as our technology becomes more mobile, the need for robust wireless networks is increasing and, in times of tight money, we struggle to find the funds to pay for these sorely needed technologies.

To raise the cap of the E-Rate program by \$1.5 billion, the Universal Service Fund fee will increase by 16 cents per month per account. 16 additional cents per month—less than half a

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penny per day—totals to an additional \$1.92 per year, approximately the cost of a cup of coffee. This proposal is both reasonable and justified, asking contributors to forgo one cup of coffee over the course of a year to ensure that our nation's schools and libraries are connected to the internet in a way that supports 21st century learning and prepares them for post-secondary opportunity.

No one questions that it is time to ensure that our libraries and schools are connected with the quality of connectivity that is sufficient and scalable for today's ever-growing connectivity needs. In less than twenty years since Congress established the program, E-Rate played a critical role in transforming levels of connectivity from less than one-quarter of schools and libraries to nearly all connected today. The E-Rate program's work is not done: Achieving the laudable broadband goals adopted by the Commission in July will require additional investment. The biggest obstacle the E-Rate program faces, even with the recent changes, remains the strain of increasing demand for E-Rate-supported services and persistently low funding.

The single most effective step the FCC can take to bolster E-Rate's current and future success is to ensure that the program's funding is adequate to support, in a sustainable manner, the program's changes and goals as adopted in July. Chairman Wheeler's proposal does just that, representing a deliberate effort to expand educational opportunities for our nation's students. By focusing on high-capacity broadband connections to the internet (particularly those in rural communities) and providing sustained, additional funding to the E-Rate program, the modernized E-Rate will ensure the nation's schools—including mine—are able to keep pace with ever increasing connectivity needs.

Thank you for considering my response as you move forward with your decision on the E-Rate program and its funding. I applaud Chairman Wheeler and the FCC for its continued efforts to protect the already oversubscribed E-Rate program by ensuring the future of this successful program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tommy Whitten", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tommy Whitten, MBA, CETL
District Technology Coordinator
Madison County Schools